Managing

Karmel’s appointment was indeed a coup. Announcing his acceptance, Crawford described him without exaggeration as ‘the leading figure in Australian tertiary education’. Educated at Melbourne and Cambridge universities, he had lectured in Economics at Melbourne before being appointed in 1950, at the age of 28, to a chair of Economics at Adelaide, where he remained until 1962. During the 1960s he was Principal-Designate, then foundation Vice-Chancellor of the Flinders University of South Australia, as well as Chairman of the Interim Council of the University of Papua and New Guinea and then its first Chancellor. He had contributed to numerous government commissions and agencies, more often than not as chairman. Most significantly, he had been chairman of the Australian Universities Commission and its successor, the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, since 1971, which suggested, as well as exceptional competence, a rapport with governments of both persuasions. His one drawback was that he was approaching 60, and so could give the University only five and a half years.

Karmel was of medium height, portly and bespectacled, with grey curly hair, an interesting asymmetrical face resulting from surgery years before, and a secret penchant for sweet biscuits. Quintessentially Australian, he had an irreverent sense of humour and a total lack of pretence or pomposity. His style was spare: metaphors, ornate or otherwise, seldom passed his lips. In committees he had a rare capacity for putting people at their ease and drawing out what they had to offer. Don Aitkin, Professor of Political Science in RSSS and Chairman of the Board of the Institute of Advanced Studies from 1984, who sat with him through many meetings, likened him to Uncle Wattleberry in Norman Lindsay’s The Magic Pudding:

His prevailing good temper, quickness of mind and grasp of the whole made him a pleasure to work with, but like Uncle Wattleberry he was capable of ‘bounding and plunging’ with rage when someone pushed him too far. A few Institute academics had a rare facility for inducing his rage.

Gregarious by nature, he nevertheless spent most of his time inside the Chancellery, provoking occasional grumbles from the provinces that the Vice-Chancellor was invisible.

His association with the ANU dated back to the war years, when he was based in Canberra as a research officer in the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, and lectured part time at Canberra University College to students in Diplomatic Studies. Many years later, in the 1970s, he was approached twice about the prospect of becoming Vice-Chancellor. Then he said no; but by 1982, having watched senior
colleagues in the public service change abruptly on retirement ‘from rooster to feather duster’, he decided that the University would be a better place to retire from, and that the ANU offered a fitting end to his formal career.

Coming directly from the Tertiary Education Commission, Karmel viewed the ANU as part of a larger system. That gave him a well-informed appreciation of its strengths in teaching and research, and a clear recognition of its weaknesses. In the early 1970s he had listened, somewhat bemused, as Ross Hohnen had justified the University’s shorter working hours for general staff on the grounds that the National University should take the lead in working conditions. Ten years later he thought that, although the ANU had suffered from budget cuts, it was still a very well funded operation compared with the state universities. He also thought that affluence had given rise to some bad habits, especially the tendency to seek more money for any proposed innovation. In the harsh new environment of scarce resources, the University had to mend its ways. He was convinced that change without growth was possible: the ANU could continue to be innovative, but only if it made better use of what it already had.

When Low had tried to deliver the same message, albeit gently through his 1 per cent levy on the research schools, many of his listeners had tried not to hear. Karmel, however, commanded attention with an authority derived from outside the University. Also, after seven years of attrition, staff were starting to accept that constraint might be a permanent affliction they would have to learn to live with. Perhaps Karmel the economist would be able to tell them how.

Signals from government made his task easier. At the election of March 1983, less than a year after Karmel had moved into the Chancelry, the conservative Fraser government was replaced by a Labor administration led by R.J.L. Hawke, who 26 years earlier had made his presence known beside the ornamental pond at University House. While education and research were not election issues, many hoped with Manning Clark that ‘the days of unleavened bread’ were over. They were soon disappointed. The new ministers were anxious above all to portray themselves as sound economic managers. The education sector was expected to provide ‘value for money’, which could be measured chiefly through its contribution to employment and the economy. Hawke’s Minister for Education and Youth Affairs (and ANU graduate), Susan Ryan, began to talk about the universities as ‘bastions of privilege’. Efficiency and effectiveness became the buzz words of the era.

Before Labor took office, Karmel had already begun a series of management reforms. Shortly after his arrival he noticed that, although the University had an academic Department of Accounting and Public Finance, its own accounting procedures were primitive: computerised record systems that had been progressively installed (and corrupted) since the 1960s were mostly inadequate and unreliable, financial reporting to parliament was a year behind schedule, and substantial special purpose funds scattered around the campus defied satisfactory management. While the ANU’s arrangements may have been superior to those of many other Australian universities, they were far behind ‘best practice’ (a term that was yet to enter the politicians’ lexicon) in large private enterprises or government. So he appointed Allan Barton, Professor of Accounting and
Peter Karmel, Vice-Chancellor from 1982 to 1987. Photograph by Bob Cooper.
an old colleague from Adelaide days, to take control of the finances as Treasurer. Barton proceeded over a period of some years to bring the system into line with modern management and accounting principles. The University’s investments were consolidated and enhanced. Just in time, the ANU was equipped to meet increasing demands by government for information and analyses covering its finances and operations.

Karmel faced a more formidable challenge in the need to reform the University’s decision-making procedures, especially as they related to the allocation of resources. Most members of the University, if asked to define in a word its form of government, would probably have responded that it was ‘collegial’, the term traditionally associated with the government of universities. Yet collegiality, of the kind often associated with Oxbridge colleges, where the master and fellows agreed to agree or disagree over a glass of sherry, was much diluted in Australia in the 1980s. Size had got in the way. So had diminishing resources: it was easier to apply collegial procedures when everybody’s needs were more or less satisfied.

Collegiality was, in any case, located chiefly among the professors and other senior academics, whose authority, based on academic distinction, filtered through the university. They in turn were receptive to influence from more junior staff, who therefore saw themselves as part of the collegial system. During ‘the Troubles’ of the late 1960s and early 1970s, many professors, including Fin Crisp and Manning Clark, when confronted with demands for democracy had tended to yield their leadership and decision-making roles, sometimes even resigning in preference to sharing their powers. The influence of the college of professors was thus eroded, leaving no one system of government in its place.

At the ANU when Karmel arrived collegiality existed alongside almost every other known form of government, from autocracy to democracy, with a dash of anarchy. Owing to the dual nature of the University, its patterns of government were more complicated than those of its counterparts in the states. There were two academic boards (not including the Professorial Board, which rarely met), as there had been since amalgamation in 1960. The research schools were administered by appointed directors, the faculties by elected deans. Patterns of leadership varied from one school or faculty to the next, depending on its historical origins and the personalities in office at a particular time. At the departmental level, variations were even more extreme, ranging from highly democratic structures with significant student representation to feudal baronies, the vestiges of an earlier era.

The result was a system ill suited to setting priorities and planning for change. Karmel recognised that the University had to be managed, which implied a hierarchy of responsibility from the vice-chancellor down. He also understood that its system of government had to retain elements of the collegial model by taking account of the collective views of the teachers and researchers who embodied the University’s intellectual resources and creative energy. As he later reflected, the old and new models of governance did not blend naturally together: ‘tension between collegial and managerial styles is bound to be chronic’.

Karmel sought to improve management procedures on both sides of the campus. In The Faculties, he tried to replace the system of elected deans by one in which they were
appointed by Council, and therefore responsible to it. When this proved too hard, he encouraged the deans to see themselves as part of a larger system, accountable to the vice-chancellor and committed to the welfare of the whole. In the research schools, he supported a new breed of directors who were committed to reform.

The Institute presented the largest management challenge. Its main problem, wrote Aitkin, who chaired its Board from 1984 to 1987, was that it had no corporate identity: ‘the seven research schools were the reality, while the Institute was simply a name used to group them’. As had been the case since the University’s inception, the individual research schools were all-powerful. There was no adequate mechanism for assessing priorities or redistributing resources, which were therefore allocated on historical lines. Within the schools, too, one year’s budget chiefly determined the shape of the next. Karmel expressed the problem succinctly: ‘History is very powerful’.

Pressure from outside provided the immediate occasion for a thorough review of resource allocation procedures. In 1984 the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, sensing the changing mood in government about the value and direction of research, asked each university to review its current practices for managing research resources, ‘with a view to establishing a strategy aimed at achieving the most effective use of funds at present available’. Karmel responded by setting up two committees, one for The Faculties and one for the Institute.

To conduct the inquiry in the Institute, he chose three younger members of the senior staff with high reputations who were known to be impatient with the existing system and keen to promote change: Peter Doherty from the John Curtin School, Jacob Israelachvili from Physical Sciences, and Don Aitkin who, as Chairman of the Board of the Institute, was asked to take the chair. Aitkin in particular knew the Institute well. In the 1960s and early 1970s he had been a PhD scholar and member of staff in Political Science, RSSS; and in 1980, after eight years as a professor at Macquarie University, he returned to a chair in his old department. He was also a member of the Australian Research Grants Committee, which gave him a good view of the Institute from outside. Youthful in appearance, and fluent in speech and on paper, he was regarded as an iconoclast, partly because he wrote an opinedated weekly column for a national newspaper. Journalism was always a risky undertaking for an academic, and Aitkin heightened the risk by writing in a style that almost every reader could understand.

Aitkin and his colleagues prepared a report which pulled no punches. Observing that these were ‘testing times’, they suggested a range of reforms to help the Institute survive in the harsher climate, including the reallocation of resources across schools, a mechanism for strategic planning, and a more hard-headed approach to poor performance by departments and individuals. They recommended that heads of schools should have more power and heads of departments less, that departments be replaced where appropriate by research groups, that the numbers of tenured staff be substantially reduced, that academics become less dependent on ‘battalions of technical and other support staff’.

These were fighting words, which provoked a fierce reaction, especially in the natural science schools. At a meeting to discuss the report in the John Curtin School, one senior academic remarked that there would be plenty of money for research if the
administrators ‘got their snouts out of the trough’; in Physical Sciences, another accused the three reformers, along with Karmel and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Ian Ross, of being themselves poor performers: ‘Your job is to provide money for physics, and you’ve failed’. Others who might in previous years have resisted the recommendations resigned themselves to them, for there was general agreement with the committee that things would get worse before they got better.

Karmel accepted nearly all the recommendations. Even before the committee had submitted its report, he had initiated a program of strategic planning aimed at giving the University as a whole a new sense of direction. Strategic planning was, in his view, a means of releasing the University from the grip of its past. Hitherto, it had moved forward in accordance with historical precedents or ad hoc decisions. Strategic planning, he said, would promote the evolution of a pattern based on decisions taken deliberately, in the light of University-wide objectives. It would also enable the ANU to set out clearly what made it different from other institutions.

The notion of strategic planning was new in a university, and met with much indifference and some resistance. Teachers in The Faculties, their minds focused on the next lecture or tutorial, wondered what purpose it would serve. A few researchers, reminiscent of Hancock in the early years of planning, questioned whether the concept was inimical to creative and curiosity-driven research which, by its very nature, might lead in directions quite different from those originally planned.

Yet Karmel steered the plan firmly through the academic boards, eliciting contributions from each school, faculty and other section, and bringing them together into a coherent and compact whole. Published in late 1987, shortly before Karmel’s retirement, it looked to the next five years, which he thought was as far as it was possible to plan in a university. Now that the structures for planning were in place, he anticipated that the process would be revisited annually, on a rolling basis. As well as giving expression to the Aitkin committee’s recommendations, the plan acknowledged the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission’s recent ‘Review of efficiency and effectiveness in higher education’, prepared by a committee which included Karmel and which emphasised, among other things, the importance of a managerial mode of operation. It was as up to date as anybody inside or outside the University could reasonably expect.

The plan specified goals for the University as a whole and its various parts, and outlined the ways those goals were to be achieved. For the first time since Coombs had proposed an exhortatory preamble to the original Act of Parliament, it set out in three dot points the University’s ‘broad objectives’:

- the undertaking of research and scholarship which are at the highest levels by international standards, with emphasis on fundamental research and with provision for work on subjects of national importance to Australia;
- the provision of formal undergraduate and graduate courses which are at the forefront of those offered by Australian universities;
- the encouragement of links which make the research and scholarship of the University and the expertise of its members available to the Australian community.
Each point could be seen as dating from a different period in the University’s history, the 1940s, the 1960s and the 1980s. Together they summarised implicitly how the University had evolved over the preceding 40 years.

But the focus of the plan was on the future; and here its authors were keen to emphasise ‘flexibility and responsiveness’, and the University’s determination, through such means as strategic planning, to surmount the barriers to change, which they frankly acknowledged. Resources would be reallocated to activities which capitalised on existing strengths. Management processes would be streamlined. All in all, the plan fairly reflected its title, which the Vice-Chancellor had suggested, ‘Commitment to change’.

Karmel regarded the development and publication of the Strategic Plan, the first produced by any Australian university, as his most satisfying achievement as Vice-Chancellor. Largely as a result of his foresight and perseverance, the ANU was better prepared than any of its counterparts to cope with anticipated changes in the external environment. Yet even Karmel, with his renowned ability to see around corners, could scarcely have imagined when he set out along the path of strategic planning, how tumultuous those changes would be.

**Integration**

In the early 1980s the ANU was still in two parts: some staff went so far as to suggest that it was two universities masquerading as one. To be sure, there was a central administration and other sections which served the University as a whole; and there were Crawford’s ‘bridges’, the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies and the Humanities Research Centre. Granted, too, many academics from the Institute contributed courses or individual lectures to departments in The Faculties; and, less frequently, academics from the two parts of the campus collaborated in research projects. But, taken together, these fell far short of academic integration.

 Outsiders often found these arrangements perplexing. A review committee of the Faculty of Arts in 1982, comprising four external professors and the Dean, expressed astonishment at the overlap and sometimes duplication of academic interests between the faculty and the social science schools: ‘To the “outside” members of the Committee, the present situation where a relatively impoverished Faculty exists cheek by jowl with relatively affluent Research Schools, especially where they have in many areas identical scholarly concerns and interest, seems rather bizarre’.

 Ian Ross, acting as Vice-Chancellor after Low had stepped down, reflected that, now that amalgamation had ‘come of age’, the time had come to take a fresh look at the relationship between the Institute and The Faculties; so he set up an ‘Interface Committee’ to look into the matter. His own view was that the University had been oversensitive about pooling its resources in order to achieve common goals.

 Yet there were sturdy barriers keeping them apart. One was the formula by which the teaching departments were staffed, which was based on student numbers. In Ross’s view,
the faculties were overzealous in allocating staff ‘strictly on the basis of bottoms on chairs’. With departments diligently watching one another to see that none received more than its share, there was a fear that any department which benefited through help from the Institute might be penalised. Hence cooperative teaching arrangements were, according to Ross, ‘scattered, irregular and even furtive’. Even the Chemists, their buildings physically linked, defied the plans of the founders of the research school and tended to keep to themselves. Collaboration on research was likewise impeded by the different government funding arrangements for each part of the University which made it difficult for staff from the Institute and The Faculties to seek support jointly for the one project.

On top of these structural problems, the resentments of the 1960s had not entirely evaporated. Manning Clark, now retired from his chair in the Faculty of Arts but much a part of the University, first as a Library Fellow and then as a Visiting Fellow, could still refer with heavy irony to those ‘great minds’ in the Institute. And young lecturers, struggling to maintain their output of publications against the burden of increased teaching loads, looked enviously to their colleagues in the research schools, who still enjoyed superior conditions.

At the same time, there were compelling reasons for bringing the Institute and The Faculties closer together. The academic arguments were obvious. The structural divisions of the University, along with the growing segmentation of knowledge, meant that some disciplines appeared in many different shapes and forms across the campus. Economics, for example, was represented in the departments of Economics, Economic History and Statistics (Econometrics), and the Centre for Research in Federal Financial Relations, in the Faculty of Economics; Economics, Economic History and the Urban Research Unit, RSSS; and Economics, the Centre for Development Studies, the Australia–Japan Centre and the North Australia Research Unit, RSPacS. Such complicated arrangements invited the question: was the University making best use of its human resources?

The same question could be asked about material resources, especially in relation to the Library. In the early 1980s there was still, as there had been since amalgamation, a single University Library, located in several different buildings. While all users were allowed access to the whole collection, which now comprised over one million volumes, ‘the Chifley’ was widely perceived as the undergraduate library and ‘the Menzies’ as the research library, where undergraduates were not especially welcome. There were also specific purpose collections, including those located in the John Curtin School and the Faculty of Law, and the new Life Sciences Library, which served the needs of researchers and undergraduates alike.

As well as being inconvenient for users, the system was uneconomic. As book prices rose and academics were forced to make hard decisions about maintaining subscriptions to expensive journals, there was no room for duplication. Fortuitously, computer technology was opening the way to integration. In 1982 a review committee chaired by Ross recommended that the Library’s holdings be rationalised, so that collections of similar materials would be located together without regard to their likely use for teaching or research. This was effected over the 1984–85 summer vacation, when truckloads of books and journals were carted from one building to another.
Many academics, unable to find books in the familiar places, cursed the changes; but they might better have cursed R.G. Menzies' decision over twenty years earlier to allow the plans for a dedicated research library to proceed.

Integration of the two parts of the University was also suggested by political considerations. Ross drew a lesson from the CSIRO which, since the time of the Whitlam government, had been having trouble maintaining its integrity, even though it was cherished as a national treasure. He concluded that, in view of the growing disposition to question the value to the nation of research for its own sake, the Institute was at considerable risk. The Faculties, on the other hand, their purpose guaranteed by the presence of students, were not. So far the Institute had found the University label to be a safe shelter: but, warned Ross, that might not always be so.

This was not the occasion to illustrate again the other horn of the dilemma: if the Institute, through a process of integration with The Faculties, were to lose its separate identity, then its claim to separate funding would disappear. Without the Institute, the ANU would become what Oliphant and others had always feared, 'just another university', funded chiefly in proportion to student numbers. That could mean the end of the ANU. The task therefore was to achieve as much academic integration as political realities would allow.

Graduate students offered an apparent means towards this end. By the early 1980s The Faculties had many more graduate students (including part-timers) than the Institute. While all of them were regulated by a single Graduate Degrees Committee, students in the same discipline but from opposite sides of the campus often had little to do with one another, unless they happened to meet at University House or through the Research Students’ Association. There was no cohesive body of graduate students, and so no cohesive body of higher degree graduates who might promote the University in the wider world.

Midway through his vice-chancellorship, Low, who had created a graduate school at Sussex, initiated a review of graduate education. Chaired by Wang Gungwu, Professor of Far Eastern History and Low's successor as Director of the Research School of Pacific Studies, the committee analysed graduate education across the campus, drawing on an expanding body of literature on the subject from other parts of the world. Having initially supposed that only minor changes to the present system would be necessary, Wang and his colleagues decided that the system needed a complete overhaul, and proposed the creation of a graduate school. Graduate education would be reorganised around a number of fields, such as Anthropology, Computer Science, Forestry, and Modern European Languages and Literature, each of which would bring together under a coordinator relevant staff from all parts of the University. The academic benefits, said Wang, were substantial: a graduate school would offer more flexible programs; instead of competing for students, departments would work together to attract the best graduates within and outside Australia; students would have access to the most appropriate supervisors and advisers from any part of the campus; and they would have much increased opportunities for meeting with their peers.

The report was thorough and challenging, too challenging for most of the faculties and schools. Wang urged the University to accept the proposals as a whole, which enabled various committees to reject the whole by identifying weaknesses in its parts.
Among the faculties, Asian Studies and Science offered wholehearted support; Arts and Economics approved in principle but forecast problems in practice; Law, generally a law unto itself (like Law schools and faculties in most universities), was ready for the other parts of the University to do as they wished, so long as it was allowed to go its own way.

Opposition in the Institute was stronger still. Even in Wang’s own school of Pacific Studies, the reaction to his report was at best mixed, the main concern of his colleagues being that the proposed graduate fields would make it more difficult for departments to choose students to fit in with their own research programs. The Physical Scientists remarked that the review put too much emphasis on course work and was too much influenced by vocational concerns; the Biological Scientists forecast decreased flexibility; the Chemists warned of an increased administrative load. All were concerned with a potential loss of autonomy, at school or departmental level. Behind most responses were fears that the proposed graduate school put the Institute at risk. Ted Ringwood, Professor of Geochemistry and soon to become Director of the Earth Sciences school, was explicit in early discussions with the committee: ‘The Institute should remain true to the Centre of Excellence concept on which it was founded. This is as essential to Australia now as it was thirty years ago. Policies on graduate education should remain subservient to this objective.’

So while several of the committee’s specific proposals were implemented, for example those relating to arrangements for graduate supervision, the report went the way of most reports that propose changes ahead of their time.

Several years later, its time appeared to come. In 1985 Aitkin’s Resources Review Committee revived the concept of a graduate school, and in due course Karmel incorporated it in the University’s first Strategic Plan. Where the Wang report had conceived the school chiefly as a means of providing improved facilities for students and making better use of the University’s resources, the Strategic Plan presented it as an opportunity both to enrich the experience of graduate students and to ‘mesh together the two halves of the University’. The graduate school would take its place alongside the Institute and The Faculties, allowing the ANU to emerge as an integrated organisation. This third stage of the University’s development was a ‘vision of the future’; and according to the Strategic Plan, it could be attained in the 1990s.

Council set the school rolling and by 1989 the Graduate School was ready to take in its first students. The school was organised much as Wang and his colleagues had intended, with graduate programs based on disciplines and drawing staff from across the University. Ray Spear, a burly, taciturn Nuclear Physicist, was appointed the first Dean, and he committed himself to making the school a success.

By now there was a new political environment, even more pressure on resources, and vigorous competition among the universities for graduate students. More than in previous years, the Institute seemed vulnerable to government interference. All this helped Spear achieve levels of cooperation that a decade earlier had seemed far beyond reach. Nevertheless, many parts of the University continued to resist the Graduate School as a challenge to local academic autonomy. The school remained a test of the University’s determination and capacity to act as one.
Change and resistance in the John Curtin School

Change came harder in the John Curtin School than anywhere else on campus. Since Ennor's unhappy departure in 1967, three men had occupied successively the office of director. First there was Frank Fenner, who had taken on the job hoping to promote the intellectual coherence of the school. By the time he left over five years later to take up the headship of the Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, he had decided that there was little a director could do to provide academic leadership, and that the most important positions in the school were the heads of departments. His successor, the Professor of Experimental Pathology Colin Courtice, who was nearing retirement, was generally regarded, and regarded himself, as a holding appointment. Frank Gibson, Professor of Biochemistry, accepted the job in 1977, more out of duty than enthusiasm, and administered the school wisely while spending as much time as possible in the laboratory. Both Courtice and Gibson were appointed from within the school, which helped sustain its members' understanding that directors should not direct.

The 1978 Review Committee challenged this assumption by suggesting that the school should have a creative director. When the time came shortly afterwards to replace Gibson (who had signified his wish not to continue), the University—through its electoral committee—took the hint and decided that, other things being equal, it would be better to recruit an outsider who was not committed to the status quo. The new director should have vitality, and a capacity to redirect the school's research emphasis and do something about its public image.

Sir Gustav Nossal, Macfarlane Burnet's successor as Director of the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute in Melbourne, was the committee's first choice, but he said no. On his recommendation, the committee approached Robert Porter, who had been Professor of Physiology at Monash University since 1967 and whose research interests were in the mechanisms by which the brain controls human movement. Aged in his late forties, Porter, like Florey, had been trained at Adelaide and Oxford. As a medical student on a Rhodes Scholarship, he had attended Florey's lectures on general pathology in the mid-1950s. A few years later in the Dunn School, he had worked in a laboratory adjacent to Florey's, and had engaged in occasional tea room conversation with the great man. Nossal described him as an extremely able all-rounder, who would provide 'dynamic, driving leadership to the whole enterprise'. Invited to an interview, Porter emphasised the need to promote the work of the school within Australia and to attract more students. The director, he said, should be able to persuade the faculty board to adopt new ideas and to lead the school in new directions, restoring it to the forefront of medical research in Australia. He stressed the need to infuse the work of the school with clinical relevance. Committee members liked what they heard and decided to offer him the job.

'May I say "yippee"?' said Porter, when told the news. Arriving in Canberra early in 1980, he embarked on his new duties with energy and enthusiasm, and a large measure of support from his colleagues. Encouraged first by Low, then by Karmel, he...
introduced changes, including the appointment of an Advisory Board comprising medical knights and captains of industry who might help attract Outside endowments that could be kept out of the hands of individual professors. He worked hard to draw the attention of politicians and the general public to the school's achievements. New appointments helped shift the balance towards clinical medicine. William Doe, a gastroenterologist who had graduated in medicine from Sydney and worked in the Hammersmith Hospital in London and the Scripps Clinic in California, was appointed Professor of Medicine and Clinical Science. Doe, who specialised in the study of inflammatory bowel disease, colon cancer and the basic mechanisms of tissue injury, was given the task of redeveloping the department in laboratories at Canberra's main hospital in the Woden Valley. Peter Doherty, who had trained at the universities of Queensland and Edinburgh and been a member of the school in the early 1970s, was appointed to the chair of Experimental Pathology, which had been vacant since Courtece had stood down to become Director in 1973. His main interests were in the experimental pathology of virus infections and immunopathology, including cancer research and work on diseases of the nervous system, such as multiple sclerosis. Doherty, who like Doe was recruited from the United States, was credited with one of the most important discoveries in immunology during the preceding decade, and was awarded (jointly) the Paul Ehrlich and Ludwig Darmstaedter Prize for 1983, the highest international award in immunology other than the Nobel Prize. Porter regarded the recruitment of Doherty as the single most important action of his first term as Director.

While these and other appointments did much to revivify the school, Porter found the task hard going. In 1984 he lamented that, although he had been Director for four years, the burden of day to day administrative work had prevented him from formulating long-range plans. He also discovered that there were 'real administrative, industrial, social and human limitations to change'. Before his arrival, a working party of the faculty board had flatly rejected the review committee's notion of a creative director; and the faculty had passed a motion approving the spirit and recommendations of the Butt report of over a decade earlier, which had vested substantial powers in the faculty board. Although Porter succeeded in having this structural impediment removed, thereby strengthening his own powers, many staff members remained wary of any attempts to interfere with their traditional notions of departmental autonomy.

The school was firmly in the grip of the past, which also seemed to take hold of its new Director. Porter, who was also styled Howard Florey Professor of Medical Research, looked to the past for understanding and inspiration, which he found in the words of Florey. As he wrote in his first Annual Report, 'A new projection of the attitudes of the School to its future must take into account the role that was defined
for the School at its inception and a realization of the objectives that were set out at that time’. He went on to quote long extracts from Florey’s 1956 report to Council, which had been declassified at his request, selecting those parts that publicised the worth and needs of the school, and managing to disguise the fact that the report, when first received in Canberra, had caused several cases of near apoplexy. In another Annual Report four years later, Porter again invoked the founder’s comments about the purposes of the school. ‘These objects’, he said, ‘are still appropriate in 1984’.

By 1986, however, he had changed his mind entirely. Over the past 40 years, he told the faculty, the school’s situation had been transformed: where it had once served an essential function in stimulating medical research and encouraging scientists to remain in Australia, now there were opportunities for research in all states, and the National Health and Medical Research Council was the major organisation engaged in encouraging postgraduate study. The school should therefore ‘put aside the historical objectives that were defined at its Foundation and develop objectives appropriate for the 1980’s and 1990’s’. It should define (and, by implication, limit) future fields of study; it should move more towards clinical medicine; and it should accept some responsibility for undergraduate teaching. While Florey again featured in the 1986 report, now he was quoted to lend support to the case for the school to develop a corporate identity and to be accountable to the wider community. The message was clear: the school should escape the past and embrace the future.

Porter’s recommendations read almost as a catharsis. They owed a lot to the University’s new emphasis on strategic planning and to the need to come to terms with shrinking budgets. His proposals were also the outcome of a personal wrestling with the past, which somebody had to undertake if the school was to move forward.

The JCSMR section of the University’s first Strategic Plan included the key elements of this rethinking: a new statement of objectives, provision for increased flexibility through fewer tenured posts, and the replacement of the departmental structure by five divisions, each comprising a number of groups. This divisional structure was introduced at the beginning of 1988, just as the school was preparing for the second major external review, due to be held ten years after the first.

In the meantime, the school had become increasingly fragmented and resentful. The fragmentation resulted partly from the 1978 recommendations, but was also partly Porter’s doing: in order to break away from the rigid departmental structure or to circumvent personality problems (of which there were many), he approved and sometimes encouraged the formation of groups or units, which became so numerous, someone remarked wryly, that every individual would shortly become a group. The resentments derived chiefly from insufficient money, but the Director bore the brunt of them. Many staff regarded him as dogmatic and overbearing in his pursuit of change. Others complained that change was proceeding too slowly. Behind him, medical scientists from all sides were sharpening their scalpels.

Bede Morris was first to turn against him. The two men had been friends and colleagues at Oxford, where Morris was a research student in the Dunn School under Florey. There he had won a well-deserved reputation as a prodigious worker and a wild
Australian. Returning to Australia, he had joined the Department of Experimental Pathology in 1958, and in 1970 had been elected foundation Professor of Immunology. A veterinary scientist and part-time grazer, whose experiments involved surgical intervention on cattle and sheep, he was a brilliant and outrageous raconteur. He also had a powerful capacity to attract trouble and to cause it. Well known inside and outside the University, he contributed much to scientific relations between France and Australia, and was retained by the French government to advise on cattle production. The French honoured him by an appointment as Chevalier dans l’Ordre Nationale du Mérite: he died tragically in a car accident near Paris before the award could be bestowed.

Morris had played a major part in bringing Porter to the ANU; but by the mid-1980s he was grumbling that Porter had assumed more power than Ennor had ever dared to exercise, and that the school would be better off without him. Having inherited Florey’s conviction that the experiment was the thing, he argued that the only way to achieve outstanding results was to create an academic environment conducive to the best original research and, within that environment, to promote bold ideas and adventurous experiments. (Research at the ANU, he said, should shine ‘like a diamond in a slagheap’.) In a paper addressed to Porter and intended also for Karmel, he set out his philosophy:

The nature of original, innovative research is its unpredictability, the high likelihood of failure and its potential for gaining new insights into areas of science whose boundaries remain undefined until the research is done. The most certain way of ensuring mediocrity in science is to do experiments whose outcome is predictable in terms of 5 to 10 year programmes.

The AIDS virus, Morris declared, showed that there was no way of knowing what research would become important in the future. Research could not be planned. By implication, there was no merit in the proposals for strategic planning. Nor, said Morris, was there room for ill-defined notions of ‘accountability’ or ‘relevance’ in laboratory-based medical research. The only way of restoring research effectiveness was to provide the departments with adequate funds and let them get on with their work as they had done in the past, without outside interference. Morris charged Porter with mismanagement, and many agreed; morale was crumbling, funds were lacking, and the Director was chiefly to blame. Others, including Peter Doherty, blamed Porter for not introducing changes fast enough.

Again the root of the problem was money. Unlike medical scientists in other universities, JCSMR staff had since the school’s inception been disqualified from seeking support from the National Health and Medical Research Council, the main national funding body for medical research. So long as the school was well funded, this prohibition did not matter. But with the onset of hard times for the University generally, the school’s position relative to other universities significantly declined, so that where in 1973 the total research funds distributed by the NH&MRC were roughly
the same as the total budget for JCSMR (which included running costs not normally categorised as part of research funds), by 1984 NH&MRC grants had more than trebled in real terms, while the JCSMR budget had slightly declined.

For Doherty and several other outspoken members of the school, including the new Professor of Physiology, Peter Gage, the restriction on access to NH&MRC grants was intolerable. Porter and Karmel agreed, and urged the NH&MRC to relax its policies. In 1985 the NH&MRC opened the door a fraction by agreeing to consider a limited number of outstanding applications put forward by the school; and then slammed it shut by rejecting all of them and telling the school to reconsider its funding priorities. Porter was furious. Gage wrote angrily to the Secretary of the NH&MRC to complain about the Council’s lack of objectivity.

Doherty in the meantime was becoming increasingly frustrated by what he saw as the school’s failure to get its own house in order. In his view, certain ‘low-key’ members of staff were holding tenured positions at the expense of active young people, while scarce funds were being squandered on outmoded research. As there was apparently no prospect of getting extra money from the NH&MRC under current arrangements, he proposed transferring to the NH&MRC entire responsibility for funding the school’s research. This would ensure that his own and other outstanding projects would receive, through the Council’s normal processes of peer review, the funding they deserved, while unworthy projects would get nothing. Porter sympathised with Doherty’s diagnosis of the problem but doubted that the NH&MRC offered the cure. Doherty, increasingly isolated within the school, wrote angrily to Karmel about what he saw as Porter’s lack of leadership. In 1988 he returned to the United States to become head of the Department of Immunology at St Jude’s Children’s Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee, remarking as he left that his experience at the ANU made it unlikely that he would ever work in a university again.

Porter, too, had been contemplating his own future for some time. In 1986, as his seven-year appointment neared an end, he wrote to Karmel about his efforts to introduce change and the obstacles placed in the way. During his term, he had been ‘undermined, discredited, compromised and almost totally incapacitated by the hostile resistance of a very few members of senior staff whose only concern seems to be the defence of their perceived privileged positions’. The director, he said, should have the powers of a chief executive. He should also enjoy the genuine cooperation of the heads of department, without which ‘the job is frankly impossible’.

With the advice of a liaison committee chosen by the school, Council concluded that he had as good a chance as anybody of giving JCSMR some direction, and offered him a second term. In the ensuing weeks, his opponents mustered against him. The faculty board debated a paper prepared by Morris which effectively charged him with mismanagement. Another senior member of staff reminded him that he and others had removed Ennor from office nearly twenty years previously, and that Ennor was a tougher man than he was. Porter was nevertheless tough enough to accept reappointment in the face of such criticism. But the sniping continued; and by September 1988, following the circulation of an anonymous letter attacking his
administration, he decided that life would be more pleasant and productive at his old university, and returned to Monash to become Dean of the Faculty of Medicine.

Earlier that year the school had been scrutinised by its second external review panel, chaired by Paul Korner, Director of the Baker Medical Research Institute in Melbourne, and comprising six other distinguished scientists from Australia, Britain and the United States. Like the review committee a decade earlier, the panel found much to praise; but it was even blunter than the earlier committee in its criticisms, especially the ‘undue fragmentation of scientific effort’ and the absence of adequate procedures for external peer review. Change was essential: ‘the original scientific organisation of JCSMR that was so successful in the 1950’s and the 1960’s is no longer appropriate for the 1980’s and 1990’s’; and the ways to achieve it included external peer review (though not through closer association with the NH&MRC), a higher ratio of untenured to tenured staff, provision for early retirement and redundancy, and a strong director, who would provide scientific leadership, recruit new leaders, point the school in new directions, and eschew fragmentation made as a sacrifice at the ‘the altar of scientific “independence”’. Where the 1978 panel had concluded that the director could rule only through consultation and persuasion, the 1988 reviewers emphasised that he should have ‘considerable power’, with the clear implication that consultation and persuasion might not be enough.

On Porter’s role, the reviewers were equivocal, acknowledging the difficulties he had faced as a newcomer and approving his efforts to create a more flexible scientific organisation, but implying that he had not fostered ‘the collegiate atmosphere that was such a feature of many of the great research institutions’. They gave little guidance as to how a collegiate atmosphere might be achieved; nor did they ask whether such a concept was at variance with their insistence on a strong director.

Why had change proved so hard to achieve? Much of the trouble went back to Florey, the structure he had created, and the way it had evolved over the past forty or so years to confirm the powers of the senior professors and the subservience of the director. Almost from the time of the school’s inception, the parts had been considered more important than the whole; and as the parts became more numerous and money more scarce, small groups and individuals insisted on their rights to autonomy and funding, seemingly oblivious of the collective interests of the University or the school. Medical researchers, convinced that their work was uniquely beneficial to the future of the nation or of humankind, might well resist anybody whom they saw as getting in the way. Yet, according to the 1988 committee, in an organisation such as JCSMR it was essential that all members of the scientific staff should have a feeling for the institution, apart from an interest in their own area of science. Some staff, in expressing dissatisfaction about how the school was run, had ‘transgressed reasonable limits of academic behaviour and standards of discussion’ and had harmed the school. They had behaved as if they had nothing to lose. It would take another review, this time of the Institute as a whole, to convince them that they did.
Equal opportunity?

The ANU in the early 1980s was dominated by men. Although women made up nearly 45 per cent of total student numbers in 1983 and nearly 40 per cent of the total staff, men occupied almost all the top positions. Of the 250 or so highest salary earners, only four were women. Women were much more likely than men to be employed on the general rather than the academic staff, to be part time rather than full time, and to be temporary rather than permanent or tenured members of staff. Among the academic staff, women were spread unevenly across the disciplines, being well represented in some areas, especially the humanities, and totally unrepresented in others. The proportion of women on the academic staff of The Faculties was more than twice as high as the proportion in the Institute, where total academic staff numbers were substantially greater. Only 2 per cent of tenured staff in the Institute were women, a figure which, according to the 1984 report from which all these figures are taken, was often described as ‘grotesque’. A table reproduced in that report showed that, owing chiefly to the low numbers of women in the Institute, the proportion of women in the University as a whole dragged far behind the figure for all Australian universities.

Women on the Academic Staff expressed as equivalent full-time numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic staff IAS and centres (excluding visitors) at 30 April 1983</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>544</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>582</td>
<td>6.53</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic staff The Faculties (excluding visitors) at 30 April 1983</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>311</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>16.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total academic staff ANU (excluding visitors) at 30 April 1983</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>855</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>956</td>
<td>10.56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic staff Australian universities at 30 April 1983</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>% Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10272</td>
<td>2358</td>
<td>12630</td>
<td>18.67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Male domination of the ANU, or of universities generally, was not new. Universities had begun as male preserves and had remained so for many centuries. Only in the later nineteenth century had women’s colleges been founded at Oxford and Cambridge, and in the United States, followed by universities in the Australian colonies. By the 1950s women made up about a fifth of students in all Australian universities; but few of those who graduated went on to follow academic careers, and those who did so normally fell into teaching roles, the assumption being that, apart from a few exceptional cases, only men had the inclination towards and the capacity
for creative research. So the ANU, as a research university, not merely followed, but exaggerated a well-established pattern.

Yet in its policies and practices towards the employment of women, the ANU was and is something of a paradox. For while its statistics for female employment continued to lag behind other universities, the recommendations of its committees and reviews were often ahead of them and of Australian society generally. Those recommendations related to the conditions of service for women, and the numbers and functions of women within the University.

Questions relating to women's conditions of service, including their salaries and benefits, came first. In Australia during the 1950s, rates of pay in most areas of employment were governed by the principle of the basic wage, a system of wage determination based on the assumed needs of the employee rather than the nature of work. Thus the basic wage was higher for a man than for a woman, on the assumption that the man had a family to support while a woman had only to look after herself or had a husband to support her. Benefits such as superannuation were similarly linked to the perceived roles of men and women. Although the universities were ahead of most other employers, including the Commonwealth and state public services, in acknowledging the principle of equal pay for equal work, the principle did not in practice extend far beyond academic and senior general staff, and was not taken to imply the uniform application of equal benefits.

From the vantage point of the 1990s, the inequities may be obvious. In the 1960s, however, people were just starting to notice there was a problem. At the ANU, as often happens in the process of institutional change, a specific anomaly gave rise to wider questioning. Max Corden, a Senior Research Fellow in Economics, RSPacS, was troubled that a research assistant in his department was ineligible for superannuation because she was married, while unmarried research assistants, both female and male, and female members of the academic staff, were all eligible. As her husband was nearing retiring age, the research assistant presumably needed the superannuation benefit. Corden wondered if an exception could be made or the rules changed.

Hohnen concluded that 'the climate might be right to propose to Council some further steps towards what is so facilely described as "equality"'. He then recruited David Bensusan-Butt, the economist from RSPacS whom we met in Chapter 7 when he was conducting an inquiry into JCSMR, to chair a Committee on Conditions of Service for Female Staff. Butt's committee enquired minutely into salaries, superannuation, leave entitlements, housing assistance and other conditions of service for every category of female staff, arduously teased out the principles, and proposed a series of policy changes intended to remove sex discrimination in the University.

Hohnen referred to the inquiry as Butt's 'quaint duty', suggesting (at the least) the extraordinary nature of the exercise. In so far as it was explicitly confronting questions relating to women in its workforce, the University was ahead of the times. Hohnen, Butt and others thought this was as it ought to be: the National University had a duty to set the lead as a good employer. The anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner in RSPacS, himself much concerned with discrimination against Aboriginal people, urged the University to
make, adopt and publicise an explicit rule that there should be no discrimination on the
grounds of sex. While he was not aware of instances of discrimination, he considered it
‘a proper exercise of the University’s social function’ to give the lead in such matters and
not merely follow the trend. The astronomer Bart Bok was equally adamant: ‘conditions
of service should be exactly the same for all staff, male or female, married or unmarried’,
and the ANU should show the rest of Australia the way.

These were heady arguments for 1964, and more than the committee could cope
with. Butt and his colleagues, two men and two women, one of whom was the
University’s only female professor, the mathematician Hanna Neumann, endorsed
without question the principle of equal pay for equal work; but they were reluctant to
abandon the notion that the University, as a good employer, should assist married
members of staff who had financial dependants. The important thing was that
married women should be treated in the same way as married men. They were also
constrained by political considerations: could the University introduce equal pay to all
categories of staff without causing large repercussions outside the University,
including the public service, and thereby offending the Commonwealth government?
So while the work of the committee represented a bold attempt to confront awkward
questions and encourage equity, its report stopped short of recommending equal pay
and conditions for all University staff. Nor did it tackle some difficult problems, such
as whether research and technical assistants who had chosen to make the University
their career should be given the same degree of permanency accorded to senior
academic staff, on the one hand, and secretaries on the other.

Above all, the committee did little to confront the widespread assumptions about
the role of women that were the basis of discrimination. These were nicely epitomised
a few years after the Butt inquiry by one of the University’s business managers who,
troubled by having to decide whether or not a young research assistant was eligible for
superannuation, minuted that she ‘being a married woman would undoubtedly not
wish to make the University a career as eventually she will have family
responsibilities’. Adrien Albert, Professor of Medical Chemistry in JCSMR, was
uncomfortable in the presence of women and, according to his biographer, clearly
believed that their place was in the home or in service positions. Manning Clark,
Professor of History in the Faculty of Arts, sometimes appointed women to
lectureships, but invariably chose women as his research assistants. Ann Moyal,
Assistant Editor of the Australian Dictionary of Biography in the late 1950s and early
1960s and a member of its National Committee and Editorial Board, recalled many
years later that most of the men she worked with wished to consign her to a secretarial
role. ‘Academic men’, she wrote, ‘—with rare exceptions—were adroit at
marginalising women colleagues and devaluing their work’.

The committee counted the numbers of academic staff in 1964: there were 337
men and 32 women. Apart from Neumann, only five women occupied positions
senior to that of lecturer or fellow. While nine out of ten men on the academic staff
were married, the numbers of married and unmarried women were about evenly split.
Nine of the seventeen married women were married to members of the ANU staff.
These figures might have led to some interesting questions about the role of women in the University; but that was beyond the committee’s brief.

A few academics recognised wider issues. Bart Bok, well acquainted with developments in the United States, including President Kennedy’s Commission on the Status of Women, and influenced perhaps by his wife Priscilla, also an outstanding astronomer, insisted in public lectures that there must be equality of opportunity for men and women, and that Australia was the loser by not making use of its ‘Woman-Power’. But such views were exceptional. It was another decade before the role of women became a matter for serious debate at the ANU.

That debate took place in the context of wider concerns about women in society and at the same time that ANU students were demanding a course on Women’s Studies. Coombs, with his unique capacity to force the University to look at itself, detonated the issue in 1974, when he was quoted as saying that the lack of women professors at the ANU was the result of conservative and male chauvinist views throughout the University. This caused consternation on the Board of the School of General Studies, which pointed out that only five out of 350 applications for chairs in the School over the last decade had come from women. Coombs explained that he had been misquoted: but what he then said to the Board and Council hit home.

My intention in referring to the University was to emphasise that, even in institutions in which formal discrimination does not exist and in which there is often sympathy with women’s aspirations, male domination tends in fact to be the practical outcome.

While the explanation lay deep within society and the difficulty of bringing about fundamental changes in social relationships, the fact was that women played ‘a really inadequate role’ in the ANU, as well as in most other universities, and that the University was the poorer because of it.

To combat the problem, Coombs suggested that Council set up a study of the role of women at the ANU and consider ways in which women might be enabled to make a contribution ‘more consonant with their numbers and their potential’. Accordingly, the Acting Vice-Chancellor invited Marion Ward, a former head of the New Guinea Research Unit, to undertake a study of the role of women in the ANU and other universities and to suggest ways of correcting the imbalance in the proportion of men and women employed by the University. Gwenda Bramley, a chemistry graduate who had lately completed an ANU degree in psychology, was appointed Research Assistant to the project and finished it when Ward left to work on overseas projects.
Drawing on statistical data, responses to questionnaires, and group interviews, Bramley and Ward documented the scarcity of women in academic life, their uneven distribution across the faculties, and their absence from decision-making bodies. The low number of women in senior academic positions they attributed to the tendency of women to drop out of the academic hierarchy at junior levels in order to fulfil their socially acceptable role of full-time wife and mother. While Bramley and Ward avoided mentioning names, there were plenty of specific examples to choose from. Thelma Hunter, the Senior Lecturer in Political Science whom we met earlier when she was opposing the dedicated course in Women’s Studies, described in the national staff association journal how she had attempted to combine an academic career with marriage, motherhood and family life. She set out the difficulties, among them assumptions about the natural or proper role of academic women: 'The academic community is predominantly male in structure and ethos. Women who have sought to make a reality of their formal equality are still essentially in conflict with existing role expectations and norms.'

Bramley and Ward proposed institutional changes to take account of women’s work life cycles, including more flexible arrangements for employment which would allow both men and women to reshape their work and family roles. They recommended that Council consider the introduction of fractional full-time staff appointments, along with measures to assist women to leave and re-enter the workforce so that they might fulfill family responsibilities while maintaining their careers. Other recommendations included the appointment of a Women’s Adviser to the Vice-Chancellor, and the initiation of a detailed study of student attitudes in an effort to explain why so few of them proceeded to higher degrees. They complimented the University on its support for child care facilities, which had been introduced as early as 1968, well ahead of most other universities and public service departments.

The Bramley–Ward Report was a pioneering study, not just in the ANU, but in Australian universities generally. In retrospect, it seems moderate in tone and cautious in its recommendations. ‘In no way’, the report declared, ‘do we seek to encourage the situation in which women are antagonistic to men and seek to improve their status at the expense of men’. It explicitly rejected ‘the introduction of a quota system or even an affirmation system for women’.

Nevertheless, it encountered some vocal resistance. Oliphant, now Governor of South Australia, after reading about the recommendations in the ANU Reporter, wrote to say that ‘if women demand equality with men they must prove themselves to be equal ... Special treatment of women ... cannot be countenanced if the ANU is to remain outstanding academically.’ Many people on campus agreed. There was also widespread indifference to the report, attributable mostly perhaps to lack of interest in the issues it raised, but also to cynicism about whether it would have significant effects. Apart from those who were specifically invited to respond, few staff took the trouble to comment. Those who did tended to be critical. Some questioned its methodologies. Others detected an inappropriate feminist bias. The proposal for fractional appointments was resisted on the grounds that part-time employees did not necessarily conduct the best research. General staff were dismayed that the report devoted little attention to them.
Without Coombs (now retired as Chancellor) or any senior member of the administration determined to give it effect, the report languished. Although Council eventually accepted most of the recommendations, some were diluted in committee, while others, such as the proposal for fractional appointments, failed to have the effects their authors had anticipated. The report omitted to set a timetable for implementing reforms or targets against which their effectiveness could be measured; and there was no pressure from inside or outside the University to ensure that the recommendations would be followed through.

Overall, the report failed because most people, men and women alike, were either indifferent or passively opposed to what it had to say. It also failed because of its own limitations. Marie Reay, a Senior Fellow in Anthropology, RSPhCS, who had studied as a doctoral student in the department in the early 1950s and joined its staff in 1959, declared that, while the report was 'a very good study of the working conditions of wives and mothers', it was not a report on the role of women in the University. One deficiency, in her view, was that it did not deal with sex discrimination. The problem was that in 1975 few members of the University, male or female, acknowledged that sex discrimination existed, and those who did found it hard to define.

By the time Karmel became Vice-Chancellor seven years later, growing community support for the concept of equal opportunity suggested that the University should not merely formulate new policies, but should also carry them out; and when the Hawke Labor government took office in March 1983, with a strong commitment to women’s issues and a vocal feminist, Susan Ryan, as Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, it became clear that if the University did not initiate and implement reforms the government certainly would. Karmel, together with the Assistant Vice-Chancellor, Colin Plowman, and the Secretary, Warwick Williams, anticipated the direction of future policy and instigated a new investigation by Marian Sawyer, a forthright political scientist from outside the University, giving her a free hand to elaborate her own terms of reference.

Sawer’s report, completed in 1984, built on the findings of Bramley and Ward and carried them further, taking care to cover issues relating to general as well as academic staff. She concluded that there had been no overall improvement in the status of women since the publication of the previous report; and that while Bramley and Ward had opened the way for the ANU to play a pioneering role in relation to what was now generally described as equal employment opportunity, the level of EEO awareness had not changed in the intervening eight or so years. Having lost its early lead, the ANU was now well behind other institutions in such matters as promulgating EEO guidelines and issuing a statement relating to sexual harassment.

Sawer was blunt about the cause: the University suffered from ‘systemic discrimination’. One element of this, the failure to adopt work patterns and career structures to accommodate family responsibilities, had already been identified by Bramley and Ward. Sawyer, with a new body of feminist literature to draw on, described others, including linguistic discrimination, homosocial reproduction (or ‘recruitment in one’s own image’) and informal networking (of a kind perhaps that her ex-father-in-law,
Geoffrey Sawer, had identified 30 years earlier when he worried that Karl Popper might not be ‘clubbable’). The cumulative effect of this systemic discrimination was that women were disadvantaged in all areas and at all levels of the ANU workforce.

Sawer presented 82 recommendations, ranging from broad policy initiatives to detailed adjustments to parts of the workforce. Her report urged the University to introduce objective selection criteria for all appointments; to ensure that women were represented on major decision-making bodies; to adopt guidelines for non-sexist language; to provide bridging finance to increase the number of women academics in the Institute; to encourage the appointment of women cleaners to supervisory roles; to refer in all job advertisements to the fact that ‘The ANU is an Equal Opportunity Employer’. Not all the recommendations related exclusively to women. One enjoined selection committees not to regard qualifications achieved overseas as automatically superior (a tilt perhaps at the residual deference to Oxbridge in some parts of the University). Another encouraged the appointment of Aboriginal men and women to the University staff.

Where the Bramley–Ward proposals had existed (relatively speaking) in a political vacuum, Sawer had a formidable and well-organised constituency behind her. Soon after she began work, a group of 80 women organised themselves into an Association of Women Employees, circularised all women staff, assembled data which Sawer was able to draw on, and presented their own report which complemented her findings. By the time the two reports were ready for publication, the government had confirmed its commitment to equal opportunity by introducing anti-discrimination legislation into parliament and foreshadowing measures which would oblige tertiary institutions (among others) to implement affirmative action policies.

Karmel, the father of five daughters, committed himself to the proposals and steered them deftly through Council, proposing or accepting amendments, additions and omissions, but ensuring that their essence and spirit were maintained. With the appointment of an Equal Opportunity Officer, the University was well placed to respond to government initiatives, including affirmative action legislation passed in 1986 which required the University, along with other large employers, to submit annual reports detailing the ways in which it was applying equal opportunity policies.

Not everyone was entirely comfortable with these measures or the premises on which they were based. Beryl Rawson, a Reader in Classics and Dean of the Faculty of Arts, who had risen near the top of the academic hierarchy with family responsibilities along the way (and who was soon to become a professor), questioned the report’s assertion that women with child-rearing experience were effectively excluded from senior decision-making and its recommendation that ‘childrearing experience be regarded in a positive light’ when assessing job candidates and appointments to decision-making roles. Other parts of the report failed to resonate with her own experience of the academic world. She reminded Sawer that ‘all types of experience have their own validity and none should be denigrated’. Helen Hughes, an economist in Pacific Studies in the 1960s who had rejoined the School in 1983 after fourteen years in the World Bank, had little time for what she saw as special pleading. Ability alone had taken her to the top of her profession, and now, as Professor of Economics
The Vice-Chancellor, centre, with the Heads of Research Schools, senior administrators and other senior members of the University in 1982.

and Head of the National Centre for Development Studies, she held her own against the most formidable of her male colleagues. A decade later, in retirement, she expressed no regret at not having made it on to the lists of prominent Australian women (even though she had). ‘I think that’s an accolade’, she told the journalist (and ANU graduate) Bettina Arndt. ‘I am not a woman, I’m a professional economist.’

But, at least in terms of rhetoric, Sawer was more in tune with the times. With a few exceptions, those who had reservations about the assumptions behind her report tended to utter them softly, behind closed doors, where their resistance was often telling.

By the early 1990s the EEO Committee was able to report steady progress in implementing the Sawer recommendations, as endorsed by Council, that equal opportunity was widely understood and that practices were well integrated. There were now well-defined procedures for ensuring equal opportunity in academic appointments and promotions, guidelines on non-sexist language, safeguards against sexual harassment, and measures to make it easier for women and men to combine family responsibilities with academic careers. The results of affirmative action were evident in senior administrative appointments. Susan Bambrick, an economist, became Master of University House (a title that she chose to retain) in 1987. Karmel appointed Rosalind Dubs, a young chemist turned administrator, to the position of Registrar in 1985. By 1994 both Deputy Vice-Chancellors, the most senior positions after the Vice-Chancellor, were women.

Yet in 1995 there was still no female head of a research school (though one had acted in that position in JCSMR); and despite the various measures to bring about equal opportunity, the academic ‘gender balance’, as it was now called, remained heavily weighted towards men. The figures spoke for themselves. In 1989 there were a total of 245 tenured academics in the Institute, of whom only 6 were women, and 223 untenured staff, of whom 42 were women. Various committees wondered why. In the natural science schools, the imbalance could be explained by the paucity of applications from women: the problem could only be solved by changes to society at
large. In some schools, too, there was continuing resistance to fractional appointments, a cornerstone of equal opportunity. And Susan Serjeantson, Professor of Human Genetics in JCSMR and soon to become the University’s first female Deputy Vice-Chancellor, noticed that women who applied for appointments and promotions tended to be more reticent than men in putting themselves forward.

The imbalance in RSSS and RSPacS presented a larger problem. Here it was impossible to argue that women were not interested in the social sciences, since women had traditionally been attracted to these areas, and there were many female social scientists in The Faculties and in other universities. The two schools therefore tried hard to encourage women to apply for advertised vacancies, and with notable success. In RSSS, for example, the numbers of women applying for jobs increased from 11 per cent between 1986 and 1988 to 25 per cent between 1988 and 1994; and of the 93 appointments offered during the latter period, 42 per cent were offered to females, suggesting on the face of it that it was now a good deal easier for a woman to win an appointment than it was for a man.

The problem was that most of the openings were junior and untenured, since most of the tenured positions were occupied by men who had been appointed before gender balance had become a pressing issue, and the overall proportion of non-tenured staff was increasing. When senior positions did fall vacant, they tended to go to men, often within the two schools. In 1994 there was no tenured woman in the Research School of Social Sciences and only one in the Research School of Pacific Studies; no woman had ever occupied a chair in the RSSS, and only one, Hughes, had been a professor in RSPacS. The staff profiles of both schools provoked acerbic comments from The Faculties and from outside the University about ‘glass ceilings’ and ‘hidden agendas’.

In both schools, faculty boards agonised about what could be done to increase the numbers of tenured women without deviating from the standard rule that all appointments should be made on the basis of merit. The History Program Review Committee tried to solve the problem by suggesting that jobs be advertised in areas of scholarship where women were known to be well represented, such as women’s history or cultural studies. But this was risky. Apart from offering no guarantee of success, it could only work in those disciplines where women had laid claim to specific fields of research.

Faced with the prospect of continuing criticism from inside and outside the University, both schools advertised for tenured positions reserved exclusively for women. This was a bold initiative, unprecedented in any Australian university, and bringing an entirely new dimension to existing understandings of affirmative action. Many staff, including some who had warmly supported the Sawer proposals, reacted uneasily. Some saw it as a far-sighted attempt to correct the inequities of the past and introduce a change of culture, others as a misguided effort to solve an image problem that apparently could not be remedied by other means.

Either way, the advertisements affirmed that the research schools meant business in attempting to improve their gender balance. Had the University sacrificed something in the process? Was it an accident that the advertisement for these
positions in what was now called the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies omitted, contrary to the University’s equal opportunity policy. The statement: ‘The ANU is an equal opportunity employer’?

*) Innovation

In teaching and research, the 1980s were years of innovation, as Low and Karmel said they had to be. New initiatives, now relabelled ‘innovative activities’ to escape a tautology, spread across the campus and took many different forms: for example, the Centre for Recombinant DNA Research in RSBS; limited term projects in RSSS on Ageing and the Family, the Law and Politics of Industrial Relations, and Social Justice in Australia, each drawing on resources from across the school; a Bachelor of Commerce degree, which allowed students to gain professional accounting qualifications in three years rather than four; a Department of Art History in the Faculty of Arts. Encouraged by government policy, members of the University also embarked on collaborative research ventures—many more than in previous years—especially with members of CSIRO and other universities in Australia and overseas.

Despite the constraints on growth, some innovations were made possible by new money. In 1982, for example, the University received funding under the Commonwealth Special Research Centres (often called ‘centres of excellence’) program to set up a Centre for Mathematical Analysis in The Faculties. Other changes resulted from restructuring and redistributing resources within the University; thus the creation in 1989 of a School of Mathematical Sciences, which brought together mathematicians and statisticians from RSPhysS, RSSS and The Faculties, including the Centre for Mathematical Analysis (shortly to be renamed the Centre for Mathematics and its Applications). The new school enabled the University to harness individual strengths into a powerful team for teaching and research, while maintaining the necessary distinctions for funding purposes between the Institute and Faculties components.

The formation of the Peace Research Centre in RSPacS tested the University’s readiness to accept money with strings attached. Peace research had emerged as a new interdisciplinary area in the 1960s, in response to public anxieties about the dangers of nuclear war. Australia was slow to enter the field; but in the early 1980s, a group of academics, public servants and representatives of voluntary organisations advocated the creation of a peace research institute, perhaps along the lines of existing institutions in Stockholm and Oslo. The idea won support within the Labor Party; and following Labor’s victory in the 1983 election, the new Minister for Foreign Affairs, Bill Hayden, moved quickly to give it effect as part of a wider policy of emphasising Australia’s commitment to disarmament.

Where should the centre be placed? The government’s first choice was not to create a new institution, but to increase funding to the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre in RSPacS for studies relating specifically to peace issues. But this met with fierce resistance from advocates of peace research, who suggested that the Strategic and
Defence Studies Centre was more concerned with war than peace, and from the centre itself, whose Advisory Committee refused to change its name to accommodate the change in emphasis. The government looked elsewhere. Some proponents argued that the new centre should be located well away from Canberra so as to reduce the risks of interference by the Commonwealth government and the bureaucracy. On the other hand, if the centre was to have any influence on policy, Canberra was obviously the place to be; and Canberra, especially the ANU, offered unrivalled resources for research. So the government invited the University to establish a ‘self-contained centre for peace studies’, which would be funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs.

The proposal for a centre devoted to the study of peace caused more than its share of conflict. According to Andrew Mack, who became the centre’s first head, peace research, though hard to define, is characterised in part by ‘a commitment to certain values and to policy-oriented research intended to realise those values’. That made it unpalatable to those who did not share those values or who were committed to what they called ‘value-free’ research. The strongest opposition came from T.B. Millar, head of the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, who questioned the ‘academic merit and standing’ of peace studies, just as the earlier opponents of his own centre had doubted the legitimacy of strategic and defence studies. And he warned that two centres concerned with similar issues, albeit from different perspectives, would lead to the duplication of research effort and competition for funds. Millar also protested that the University was giving way to government pressure, an argument reminiscent of objections a decade before to the Centre for Research in Federal Financial Relations.

Nevertheless, the University accepted the government’s invitation and the Peace Research Centre was established in 1984, with the stated aim of carrying out research and providing training on ‘topics relating to the conditions for establishing and maintaining peace on national, regional, and global scales’. Millar resigned in protest as head of the Centre for Strategic and Defence Studies.

The Peace Research Centre was certainly vulnerable. Its budget was open to parliamentary scrutiny and the government could close it down at one year’s notice. Yet according to Mack in 1989 there had never been ‘the slightest hint’ of interference by the government or the bureaucracy. On the other hand, although staff in the centre were prepared to criticise government policies and did so, Mack conceded that ‘self-censorship of a subtle kind is a near inevitable consequence of insecure funding’. As he wryly put it, the situation of being directly dependent on the government was ‘highly instructive and enhances appreciation of the academic freedom which normal university life still offers’.

About the time that the Peace Research Centre was opened, the Mount Stromlo and Siding Spring Observatories celebrated a major innovation in the form of a 2.3 metre telescope at Siding Spring. This originated in the vision of Don Mathewson, who had succeeded Olin Eggen as Director of the Observatories in 1979. Mathewson insisted that if the ANU was to remain at the forefront of astronomical research it would need a new, superior telescope, the cost of which, if purchased, would certainly be beyond the University’s means. His entrepreneurial solution involved ingenuity, expertise and risk.

The opportunity to build a new kind of telescope presented itself in the form of a
massive slab of astronomical, low expansion glass, 90 inches (nearly 2.3 metres) in
diameter, which had become available in Ohio. This could be used as the mirror in an
advanced technology telescope, more versatile than conventional telescopes and
operated by computers, which would allow stars to be tracked with meticulous
accuracy. The glass was on the market at a bargain price of about $250,000.

There was a catch: the glass was too thick for its intended use and would have to be
sliced in two. This was a hazardous undertaking. Moreover, as it was pitch black, there
was no way of telling if it was cracked beneath the surface, which would make it
unusable for astronomical purposes.

The gamble paid off. As Mount Stromlo held its breath, the glass was cut to order
in the United States and discovered to be unflawed. The surplus half was sold at a
price equal to the cost of the original purchase, so that the University had in effect
acquired the glass for nothing. The remainder of the telescope was designed and
constructed largely in-house, drawing on astronomical, engineering and computing
skills in MSSSO and other parts of RSPhysS, with the result that the total cost was a
fraction of what it might otherwise have been. The completed instrument won a
national award for engineering excellence and is widely regarded as occupying a
significant place in the evolution of the modern telescope.

During the 1980s, the ANU took several major initiatives in the related fields of
engineering and information technology. The broad field of information, said Low in
1981, was clearly the way of the future and a subject of national importance in which
the ANU had a role to play. Yet it was also ‘a glaring omission’ in the Institute’s range
of activities. Now there was an opportunity to make ‘a small number of powerful
appointments’ in the field of systems engineering. In particular, Brian Anderson,
Professor of Electrical Engineering at the University of Newcastle (NSW) and one of
Australia’s most talented engineers, had indicated he might be prepared to move to
Canberra. Despite some resistance from those in the Institute who thought that
enough money had gone to areas relating to the physical sciences, Low won the debate
and Anderson was duly appointed to head a new Department of Systems Engineering
in RSPhysS. Before long, the department was doing major work relating to adaptive
control, signal processing and system identification. In 1991 it became the first
section of the University to participate in the Commonwealth government’s new
program of Cooperative Research Centres when a CRC for Robust and Adaptive
Systems was established in partnership with CSIRO, the Commonwealth’s Defence
Science and Technology Organisation and Australia’s largest company, BHP.

The ANU’s association with computers extended back to 1962, when it acquired an
IBM 1620. This was housed in the Department of Theoretical Physics, RSPhysS, but
members of the University from outside the department were encouraged to use it for
research and some teaching. With the introduction of a ‘state of the art’ IBM 360/50 three
years later, the University joined the computer revolution. Astronomers, physicists,
psychologists, economists, linguists were soon vying for computer time and adjusting
their research activities to exploit the opportunities the new technology offered. By 1968
the computer facility had evolved into a Computer Centre, independent of RSPhysS, and
Left: Don Mathewson in 1979, with a model of the 2.3 metre telescope he hoped to build at Siding Spring. Below: the telescope at the time of its opening in 1984, housed in a cuboid building which rotates on its base. The Anglo-Australian Telescope is in the background. Photograph by Bob Cooper.
intended to serve the whole campus. The centre, later renamed the Computer Services Centre, combined research and service functions, an arrangement typical of the early days of computing in universities, but later universally abandoned.

Over the next decade, the University’s mainframe computer was upgraded, individual departments acquired their own facilities, and the various components were linked into a network. By the late 1970s, the University’s total annual expenditure on computing equipment and programming staff exceeded expenditure on book and journal acquisitions and staff in the library system. Personal computers, introduced in the early 1980s, heralded the second phase of the revolution. By the mid-1990s most researchers, whether staff or graduate students, had their own computers and access to electronic communication.

The University also entered the new world of supercomputers. During the 1980s, the demand for computing power throughout the Australian university system was fast outstripping the capabilities of conventional computers, leading to talk about establishing a national supercomputer facility. As the national approach was making little progress, the ANU took the plunge with the purchase in 1987 of a Fujitsu FACOM VP50 vector processor, and the creation of the ANU Supercomputer Facility.

About the same time, the University formed a Centre for Information Science Research (CISR), which drew together relevant sections of the Institute of Advanced Studies and The Faculties, and also included the CSIRO’s Division of Information Technology, which was soon to move onto the ANU campus to ensure close collaboration. CISR’s purpose was to support innovative work relating to computer applications and telecommunications, and to develop collaborative ventures with the computer industry. Michael McRobbie, a logician from the Department of Philosophy in RSSS who had moved into the field of automated reasoning, was appointed Executive Director, and became an energetic entrepreneur.

Through CISR, the University entered into a wide variety of research and development contracts with the Fujitsu company, by now its principal supplier of mainframe computers. Fujitsu supplied without charge, before delivery to any other site, a prototype computer employing the new technology of parallel processing so that algorithms could be developed for its use. From this base, the centre and its departmental members, in collaboration with CSIRO, Fujitsu and numerous other industry partners, secured funding for a CRC for Advanced Computing Systems, and in further collaboration with universities and Telecom Australia (later Telstra) for a share in a Research Data Network CRC.

Teaching in computing had begun modestly in 1962 in the Department of Statistics in the Faculty of Economics. A separate Department of Computer Sciences was not established in The Faculties until the late 1970s, when Richard Brent, who
had been a member of the Computer Services Centre, was appointed foundation professor. Brent helped show that the University was already rich in resources relating to research in computing; and John Carver, Director of RSPhysS, saw the potential to create a small research department with Brent, who was being wooed by other institutions, as its head. So in 1985 the Computer Sciences Laboratory was established, initially in the old Department of Engineering Physics.

Where some directors, most memorably Titterton, were determined to maintain the integrity of their research schools, Carver believed the University would benefit by the creation of new schools out of parts of the old. For many years the astronomers, still formally a part of RSPhysS, had been straining at the leash. Carver supported their claims for complete independence, so that in 1986 the Mount Stromlo and Siding Spring Observatories were established as an autonomous centre within the University. He encouraged the formation of a School of Mathematical Sciences, and he recognised that the Department of Systems Engineering and the Computer Sciences Laboratory, riding the wave of technological progress, had the potential to become a dynamic new school. This was achieved in 1994 with the creation of the Research School of Information Sciences and Engineering (RSISE).

A third major innovation in RSPhysS occurred in 1988 when the school received special funding for a Department of Electronic Materials Engineering, and lured Jim Williams from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology to head it. The new department aimed to redress the University’s weakness in semiconductor science, and Australia’s lack of capacity to compete in developing the solid-state electronic devices which are at the heart of computing and communications. This development provided the stimulus for RSPhysS to change its name in 1991 to the Research School of Physical Sciences and Engineering (RSPhysSE). As well as reflecting a gradual shift in emphasis, the change in name helped signal that over the preceding decade the school had been largely rebuilt.

Moves to introduce undergraduate teaching in engineering began in the 1970s. Ian Ross, one of the proposal’s strong advocates, imagined a completely new kind of engineering degree, which emphasised the management and social aspects of the discipline. He was given to saying that the engineering graduate of the future would be a woman who knew how to design the Black Mountain tower (then under construction) and who also knew and understood why it should not be built. Apart from its intrinsic merits, engineering would enable the ANU to increase its range of offerings which, when compared with metropolitan universities which had the traditional faculties of medicine and dentistry, sometimes seemed narrow. On the other hand, just as forestry and accounting had met with resistance in the 1960s, engineering was suspect to those academics who regarded professional courses with disdain. There was also doubt whether sufficient students would be attracted to make

In 1989 the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Ian Ross, left, shakes hands with the President of Fujitsu Laboratories, Masaka Ogi, after signing a contract joining the ANU and Fujitsu in research and development projects in artificial vision systems and parallel computing.

Computers revolutionised access to the Library and began to transform its collections. Colin Steele, University Librarian from 1980, poses with a book on disc in 1992. Photograph by Peter Wells.
Communicating science: Michael Gore, a senior lecturer in Physics in the Faculty of Science, developed a novel way of explaining science to secondary school students through simple but stimulating exhibits of scientific and technological principles. With an innovative teaching grant from the Commonwealth government and voluntary help, he created ‘Questacon’ in the former infants building of a local school. Questacon opened in 1980 and was an outstanding success. It became the basis for the National Science and Technology Centre, established in 1988 with Gore as Director.

The courses worthwhile. In the event, the Institute of Engineers, the professional body responsible for accrediting engineering courses, was unresponsive; and more decisively, the AUC, under Peter Karmel, declined requests for funding. So the proposals lapsed.

They were revived in the late 1980s, again with Ross at the fore. By now, new engineering courses were appearing in various institutions, including the Canberra College of Advanced Education. For a time it seemed that the University and the College might offer a joint engineering degree. But negotiations became submerged beneath a wider debate (discussed in the next chapter) about whether the two institutions should amalgamate.

In the meantime, Robin Stanton, Brent’s successor in the Computer Sciences chair in the Faculty of Science, took the lead in devising a scheme for an engineering program that would start small and grow steadily into a faculty. In 1990 Darrell Williamson was appointed to head an Interdisciplinary Engineering Program in the Faculty of Science. This immediately proved successful in attracting high quality students and outside money for research. In 1993 the program joined with the Department of Computer Science in the Faculty of Science to form a new Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology. So, by the mid-1990s, the large field of engineering, having been neglected in the University’s early years, now figured in the titles of two research schools and one faculty.

These are just a few of the areas where members of the University seized opportunities as they arose and created new ones. The common ingredients of innovation were ingenuity and leadership, augmented by the occasional infusion of new money. Gradually members of the University adjusted to hard times and learnt that it was possible to introduce change without growth.